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Alaska State Legislature
Chair of the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force
Testimony for the Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Hearing on Alaska's Sovereignty In Peril: The National Ocean Policy's Goal to Federalize
Alaska
April 3, 2012**

**SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE ALASKA NORTHERN WATERS
TASK FORCE**

The United States is an Arctic Nation because of Alaska. Diminishing sea ice and the intensifying worldwide race for natural resources has rapidly increased international interest in the Arctic. Arctic Nations are anticipating the development of northern shipping routes, mineral extraction, oil and gas exploration, commercial fisheries, and tourism. For Alaska, the economic benefits over the long term could be substantial. But how will we confront the challenges and opportunities awaiting us in the Arctic while also providing for sustainable communities and protecting the environment?

In 2010, the Alaska State Legislature established the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force (ANWTF) to identify opportunities to increase the state's engagement with these issues. The task force is comprised of state legislators, leaders from Alaskan communities, and representatives of key state and federal agencies. The task force held twelve hearings in Juneau, Anchorage, Barrow, Wainwright, Kotzebue, Nome, Wales, Bethel, and Unalaska. Over 65 experts from universities, U.S. military, non-governmental organizations, and dozens of state and federal agencies testified. Additionally, the task force heard public testimony from local communities and residents. On both the state and federal level, the task force has identified numerous urgent needs. The following are its top three recommendations:

1. State-wide public testimony gathered by the task force made it clear that the state and federal governments must provide Alaskans with meaningful opportunities to participate in Arctic policy and Outer Continental Shelf development decisions. Many local government officials, tribal government representatives, and individuals expressed a need for timelier, more frank, and more thorough information from state and federal authorities regarding policies and activities off Alaska's coasts. The task force believes that consistent, structured communication and consultation—particularly with those Alaskans likely to be most impacted by evolving

conditions—is the best way to build consensus, advance responsible policies, and stimulate broadly beneficial economic development.

2. The state of Alaska has only just begun to grapple with the challenges and opportunities developing in the far north. It is imperative the state be strategically involved and in a leadership role in the development of policies affecting the state, its communities, and citizens. It is therefore among the task force’s highest priorities to press for the creation of a commission to develop a comprehensive state strategy for the Arctic. As the Arctic changes, the decisions Alaska faces will continue to evolve and grow in complexity. An Alaskan Arctic Commission will enable Alaska to more effectively respond to unfolding developments and will jumpstart Alaska’s preparations to ensure that the interests of the state and its people are protected. The commission will also provide a means for communities and residents to remain engaged and be heard. To further this recommendation, the legislative task force members submitted House Concurrent Resolution 23 (HCR 23) to the legislature for consideration. HCR 23 creates a 17 member commission whose purpose is to develop an Alaskan Arctic Policy. HCR 23 has passed the House of Representatives and is now in the Senate for consideration. I am hopeful that it will pass the legislature this session.
3. The NWTF supports the Alaska State Legislature and the state of Alaska continuing to encourage the United States Senate to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Joining the more than 165 other nations that have ratified UNCLOS will enable the U.S. to peacefully legitimize its claims to resources in areas of the Continental Shelf that extend beyond the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone. To quote President George W. Bush, who, like President Barack Obama, supports U.S. ratification of the convention, “It will give the United States a seat at the table when the rights that are vital to our interests are debated and interpreted.”

The following pages include additional priorities, among the many findings of the task force, in areas including Arctic governance, oil and gas development, marine transportation, infrastructure, fisheries, and research. The in-depth recommendations of the task force can be found at www.anwtf.com.

Arctic Governance:

Changes in the Arctic make it necessary to evaluate the adequacy of existing Arctic governance structures and to consider adjusting these systems or creating new ones to better suit developing needs. At the international level, Arctic nations must strengthen their relations and enhance regulatory frameworks and policy mechanisms to address pressing issues. We in Alaska must ensure that our Arctic residents and the State of Alaska have a strong voice in these matters.

1. The NWTF supports the development of a comprehensive U.S. Arctic policy that is adequately funded to carry out its mission. This policy should ensure that national interests are balanced with Alaska state interests, so that commitments to safeguard the environment and the wellbeing of the region’s communities and cultures accompany all strategies for economic development.

2. The NWTF recommends that the State of Alaska and the United States participate in the adoption of international agreements for shipping, fisheries, oil and gas development, and other transboundary issues. It is in our interest to ensure all parties develop resources in the region safely and responsibly.
3. The NWTF recommends the State of Alaska and the Alaska State Legislature support greater international cooperation through the Arctic Council. Having recognized that the Arctic Council is the world's predominant intergovernmental forum for Arctic governance, the NWTF recommends greater state engagement with the council and encourages its member countries to support expanding its mandate as an institution for forging multilateral agreements among Arctic nations. In May 2011, the Arctic Council formalized a search and rescue agreement detailing plans for Arctic emergency response. The Arctic Council also created a task force on oil spill preparedness and response. The task force is co-chaired by Russia and the United States, and is meeting for the third time in Anchorage on March 20-22, 2012. More agreements of this nature need to be finalized before development increases. Should the Council's mandate expand further into economic development issues in the Arctic, the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission's usefulness will only increase. Additionally, Canada will chair the Arctic Council in 2013 and the United States will assume the chairmanship in 2015. The two countries should partner closely during their respective chairmanships to further mutual goals. The United States and Alaska should begin working together now with Canada to begin the collaborative process. The Arctic Policy Commission's deliberations and recommendations will be vital in assuring that Alaska makes the most of any partnership.

Arctic Oil and Gas Development:

A warming Arctic provides new opportunities and challenges for oil and gas development. A 2008 US Geological survey estimates that 13 percent of the earth's undiscovered oil reserves and 30 percent of the undiscovered gas reserves are in the Arctic.

1. The NWTF recommends that the State of Alaska and the United States develop a framework for the identification, acquisition and sharing of data and other information to support leasing, permitting, and other agency decisions.
2. The NWTF recommends that the State of Alaska and the United States support continued improvement in the ability of industry and the government to prevent, contain, control, clean-up and remediate spills in the Arctic. These measures should include contingency plans and response capabilities for all vessels operating in Arctic waters.
3. The NWTF recommends that the University of Alaska establish an oil spill research center. The University of Alaska has requested funding of approx. \$2 million to establish an oil spill research center but it is not currently in this year's budget.

Arctic Marine Transportation:

Maritime powers have been searching for a shorter route from the Atlantic to Asian waters for centuries. The warming Arctic raises the feasibility of two such routes: the Northern Sea Route, north of Russia, and the Northwest Passage, north of Canada and Alaska. Shipping traffic—already increasing—is expected to surge in the decades ahead. We must take steps to establish secure and environmentally sound marine transportation in the region as soon as possible.

1. The NWTF recommends that the United States, with the participation of the state of Alaska, work with the international community to finalize the Polar Code for ships operating in Arctic waters and examine whether to establish an offshore vessel routing scheme for circumpolar marine traffic, including through the Aleutians.
2. The NWTF supports increasing short- and long-range navigational aids in the North American Arctic and extending Automatic Identification System (AIS) vessel tracking across the North Slope waters to Tuktoyaktuk, in the Northwest Territories.
3. The NWTF endorses completing the Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment and recommends that the state of Alaska support and participate in the United States Coast Guard Port Access Route Study.

Arctic Fisheries:

As sea ice diminishes and some commercial fish species move into northern waters, interest in Arctic fisheries has increased. However, currently there is not nearly enough information available to make sustainable management of commercial fisheries possible there, and in 2009 the North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a moratorium on commercial fishing in Alaskan waters north of the Bering Straits. The NWTF believes the state of Alaska and the U.S. government should continue in its precautionary policy, but the moratorium should not cause Alaska to postpone research into viable Arctic commercial fisheries.

1. The NWTF recommends greatly increasing fisheries-related research and monitoring in the region.
2. The NWTF encourages the state of Alaska and the U.S. government to continue actively negotiating fisheries-related transboundary accords with other nations.
3. The NWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and federal authorities prepare strategies to maximize the degree to which local communities and resident Alaskans will benefit from the development of commercial fisheries in Arctic waters.

Arctic Infrastructure:

Immediate investment in Arctic infrastructure is a foremost priority for Alaska and the entire United States. Increased human activity related to shipping, oil and gas development, commercial fishing, and tourism will require, at a minimum, new ports and safe harbors, equipment and facilities for oil spill response, additional Polar Class icebreakers for the U.S. fleet, and improved charting and mapping.

1. The NWTF recommends the Alaska State Legislature and the state of Alaska continue to urge the federal government to forward base the United States Coast Guard in the Arctic and to fund the construction of additional ice breakers and ice-capable vessels for the U.S. fleet. To further this effort, the legislative members of the task force submitted House Joint Resolution 34 (HJR 34) for consideration. This resolution urges the US Congress to fund all the facilities and vessels necessary for the US Coast Guard to fulfill its Arctic missions, including funding more icebreakers and forward basing the Coast Guard to the Arctic. HJR 34 has passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate.
2. The task force recommends the state of Alaska and the federal government continue efforts to develop deep-water ports and additional safe harbors in northern waters as soon as possible. The State of Alaska and the US Army Corps of Engineers is currently undergoing a ports study. The task force strongly urges that these efforts be fast tracked and that the development and construction of at least one Arctic port be undertaken in the next several years.
3. The NWTF supports increased funding to expedite the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Hydrographic Arctic mapping. The task force particularly supports updated mapping of coastal navigation routes and entrance routes to coastal villages.

Arctic Research:

Worldwide climate change is having an outsized impact on the Arctic, where temperatures are rising twice as quickly as those in more southern latitudes. Profound transformations are underway in the Arctic's complex ecosystems. These changes are expected to trigger unprecedented degrees of human activity in the region. As a consequence, transformation in the far north will accelerate all the more, not just environmentally, but also on socioeconomic levels. Under these circumstances, the need for wide-ranging scientific research and monitoring in the Arctic has never been more pressing. We must continue to gather essential baseline information about the environment and its dynamics in order to become better able to discern shifting conditions. In turn, we will grow more proficient at grasping the implications of changes there, and we will improve our ability to prepare for and mitigate impacts. The NWTF recommends:

1. The NWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and the federal government identify priorities for Arctic research. By ranking priorities funding can be targeted more effectively and research can be better coordinated. Major knowledge gaps will be closed far more quickly.

2. The NWTF recommends improving the exchange of research information and integration of data management. Faster and more extensive integration of data collected by state and federal agencies, academics, and industry would yield enormous benefits for all stakeholders.
3. The NWTF recommends increased long-term monitoring of the Arctic, including routine surveys of key chemical, physical, and biological parameters of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. In order to better understand, quantify, and predict the effects of on-going changes in both marine and terrestrial Arctic ecosystems, Alaska must increase our long-term monitoring of a wide range of environmental characteristics. Funding for Arctic Ocean monitoring is under consideration in the Alaska State Legislature but is not currently in any budget.

There are many issues facing the Arctic. Many need attention and action now. Working together we can develop the Arctic in a manner that benefits the state while maintaining healthy sustainable communities. The Arctic conversation is really just beginning but the dialogue must continue and engage all stakeholders. The forum for the dialogue isn't as important as the opportunity for consistent, meaningful dialogue and input. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.